

KNOCK 'EM DEAD!

Written by

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COLD OPEN:

FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Close-up of a headshot of BILLY HARGROVE (40s). He's smiling.

BILLY (V.O.)
I used to be a comedian.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

CUT TO:

Billy doing stand-up with a handheld microphone on a televised late night talk show.

BILLY (V.O.)
I was actually pretty popular.
People knew me from my stand-up.

INT. TV SCREEN - NIGHT

CUT TO:

Billy wears a nice suit and has an animated conversation with a man outside a deli who is dressed like a giant pickle.

BILLY (V.O.)
My sitcom.

CUT TO:

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Billy dances in front of an annoyed cashier and a long line of surprised people.

BILLY
It's "Making Babies Time!"

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Billy jumps in the backseat of a car. A man sits in the front seat, behind the wheel.

BILLY (V.O.)
And my movies.

BILLY
You're my Lyft driver, but you
don't have the company logo.

DRIVER
That's 'cause the car's stolen.

The driver puts on a skimask, and the car screeches off!

Close-up of Billy screaming in absolute fear!

BILLY
AHHH!!!

CUT TO:

INT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT

CUT TO:

A long line of fans stand in front of a box office to buy
"Billy Hargrove In Concert" tickets. They are all excited,
and some are holding his poster.

BILLY (V.O.)
I had devoted, adoring fans...

INT. OFFICE - DAY

CUT TO:

A group of well-dressed producers watch Billy sign a
contract. He finishes, and they offer him champagne. They all
toast and drink.

BILLY
A 3-picture deal with the biggest
studio in Hollywood.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Billy looks at himself in the mirror and winks.

BILLY (V.O.)
And one major problem: I was a self-
absorbed, dishonest egomaniac.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A BEAUTIFUL REDHEAD WOMAN slaps Billy.

CUT TO:

BEAUTIFUL REDHEAD WOMAN
(Weeping)
You heartless bastard!

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Billy is in a discussion with a distraught man.

DISTRAUGHT MAN
You can't fire me, I got you the
sitcom! Billy - without you, my
kids can't go to school!

BILLY
Told ya not to have kids.

He leaves, and the man starts banging his head on his desk.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Billy talks to a NEUROTIC COMIC.

NEUROTIC COMIC
I trusted you, and you stabbed me
in the back!

BILLY
No, I taught you a valuable lesson:
Don't trust people.

INT. NEWSPAPER IMAGE - DAY

CUT TO:

Close-up of a photo of a car that has been in a major wreck.
An ambulance is in the background.

BILLY (V.O.)
Then came the accident.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM - DAY

Angle on Billy sitting in a chair, addressing the camera.

BILLY

My name is Billy Hargrove. Most people think I'm gone. But not only am I still here ... I'm here to help.

He leans forward, intensely.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Because I don't have a choice.

TITLE CARD: "KNOCK 'EM DEAD".

ACT ONE.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Angle on the same car from the accident. The camera zooms out slowly as we see debris, the ambulance, police officers interviewing bystanders, and a news crew. Two paramedics carry a body on a stretcher.

Billy watches from across the street. Shocked and confused, he begins walking toward the accident scene. Two members of the paparazzi try to duck under a strip of yellow cautionary tape, but are immediately stopped by police officers.

Billy, however, walks right through the tape, which doesn't break. Nobody stops him. He approaches the crashed vehicle.

BILLY

My car. This is my car. What happened?

BERNIE (O.S.)

A drunk driver put his truck in park at 60 miles an hour.

Billy looks over to see BERNIE SPAGNETTI (60s). He has grey hair, a mature and wise face, an immaculate suit, and leather shoes that look like they were shined seconds ago.

BILLY

Bernie?

BERNIE

Good to see you, William. You
always were my most exciting
client.

Bernie approaches, smiles, and gently puts his hand on
Billy's shoulder.

BILLY

(Backing away, scared)
But how are you here? You're...

BERNIE

Not alive? Deceased? Six feet
under, devoured by maggots?
Alright, well, I can't dispute
that. I always said I'd rather have
a dead body than a dead career.
Careful what you wish for, huh?

BILLY

Right.
(In disbelief)
So a drunk driver hit my car?

BERNIE

Yes.

BILLY

Where was I?

BERNIE

Why don't we go sit down?

BILLY

WHERE WAS I?!!

BERNIE

Behind the wheel.

BILLY

What the hell are you saying?

BERNIE

You know exactly what I'm saying,
Son.

Billy processes everything, trying to make sense. Bernie
remains calm and gentle, careful to not add to his stress.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

You're a celebrity, and nobody's
even looking at you. Why do you
think that is?

Billy panics and runs up to a paramedic. He gets right in her face, gesticulating and yelling.

BILLY

Hey Lady - it's me, Billy Hargrove!
Come on, I know you've seen me do
this on TV: "Making Babies Time!"

He does one of his signature dance moves. The paramedic doesn't notice; she continues working. Bernie walks up behind him.

BILLY (CONT'D)

(Turning around)
Why can't she see me? I'm right
here!

Bernie doesn't want to deliver the emotionally devastating knockout blow, but he knows it's for the best.

BERNIE

Yes, you are. But you were just
right there.

Bernie points. Angle on the paramedic pushing Billy's fresh corpse on a gurney, heading toward the ambulance.

Billy has no choice but to accept the truth. He cries and collapses into the arms of Bernie, who consoles him.

CUT TO:

INT. "CLOUD NINE" BAR - DAY

Billy and Bernie sit at a table in "Cloud Nine", a bar/restaurant that is seemingly for Angels. It has white interior, peaceful music and happy customers. Billy is still coming to grips with his situation.

BILLY

And I thought dying on stage was
tragic.

LARRY (30s), an excited waiter, trots over to them.

LARRY

Oh ...My...God, it's Billy
Hargrove!

BERNIE

Billy, this is-

LARRY
Larry Padrolli, huge fan!

Larry aggressively shakes Billy's hand like it owes him money.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Welcome to our Heavenly establishment.

BILLY
Thank you, Larry. Feel free to let go of my hand any time.

LARRY
Oh, sorry. What are we drinking today, fellas?

BERNIE
Club soda with a lime, please.

BILLY
Double Maker's. Neat.

LARRY
Well, let's get this party started! I'll be right back with your angelic libations.

He does a full spin and is suddenly carrying both men's drinks, which he serves to them.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Here you go!

BERNIE
Thank you.

BILLY
Impressive. I can *easily* get used to this kind of service.

LARRY
Well, don't count on it, you might end up in The Underworld.

He gestures to a section of the restaurant that's on a lower level. Some customers appear normal; others look demonic.

BILLY
You guys serve Hellions, too? Well, at least you don't discriminate.

LARRY

Yeah, and people in that section are the biggest harassers, because they're always "horny"!

He laughs until he realizes no one else is.

BERNIE

That'll be all for now, Larry.

LARRY

Ok, thanks so much!

He rushes off.

BILLY

Here's to avoiding Hell.

The two men toast and drink.

BILLY (CONT'D)

What was it you were saying about I have MOST things from my past?

BERNIE

Ah, yes. So you technically no longer have your body - meaning the majority of the living cannot see it - but you got everything else.

BILLY

If I don't have a body, what "else" is there?

BERNIE

Brains. Mannerisms. Personality. Sense of humor. Your entire essence.

BILLY

Then what's this?

He runs his hand down his arm and pats his shoulders.

BERNIE

Your body is real to you, because you see and feel it. But you're actually a soul, an extra energy that most people never even detect.

Billy takes a sip.

BILLY
 So nobody can see or touch me.
 Well, at least I can touch myself.

A man from The Lower Level section, dressed like The Grim Reaper, walks by, staring at them.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 Mother of God.

A Kenny G-esque, Muzak-type song begins in the background.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 I bet Hell has better music.

BERNIE (BEAT)
 There's somebody I'd like you to meet.

BILLY
 Is is Satan? 'Cause I can't deal with my Stepmom right now.

EXT. PATIO - LATER

CUT TO:

Bernie leads Billy to a beautiful courtyard. It contains a few people, all sitting on couches and hammocks, and drinking exotic refreshments that look like Strawberry Mojitos or Mint Juleps. Some eat decadent, chocolate desserts. A HARP PLAYER strums a peaceful tune.

BERNIE
 Just please be respectful.
 Remember, I report to HER.

BILLY
 Sure, whatever, boss. What's her name again, McKenzie?

BERNIE
 Madeline.

BILLY
 Right! Close enough.

Bernie glances at him as if to say, "Behave", before leading him across the courtyard.

Angle on MADELINE COOK (50s), a stunning, pensive woman. She is tall and has piercing blue eyes that, when fixated on someone, seem to penetrate their soul and know their every thought.

They approach her.

BERNIE

Madeline Cook, I give you Billy Hargrove.

She rises and shakes his hand.

MADELINE

Well, My Goodness. What a splendid celebrity treat.

BILLY

"Splendid celebrity treat"? That sounds like a new flavor at Baskin-Robbins.

She smiles.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Guess it's your lucky day. Just not mine.

Seeing she has her work cut out for her, Madeline smiles and gives Bernie a "I'll take it from here" nod.

BERNIE

Well, I'll let you two get acquainted. I'm gonna go play the raffle and try to win the "Free Therapy Session With God."

He exits.

BILLY

We can get life coach appointments with The Man Upstairs?

MADELINE

Well, technically, I also work upstairs, so He's more like "The Man Down the Hall ... Who Puts Fish in the Microwave."

She smiles at him. He appreciates her joke, but he's obviously still in emotional turmoil.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

Let's go inside.

INT. ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Madeline and Billy sit on a couch in a posh room.

BILLY

So you're Bernie's boss. What are you, The Angel Manager of Heaven?

MADELINE

You're not in Heaven.

BILLY (FREAKING OUT)

Oh, no ... Oh, no! Look, I know I wasn't perfect, but I don't wanna burn for eternity!

MADELINE

It's okay, Billy. You're not down there, either.

BILLY

So that means I'm ... where?

MADELINE

Look outside.

Billy glances out the window and sees a group of people doing "The Limbo". He realizes the song playing is "Stuck In The Middle With You". He sees a sign that reads, "Welcome To 'The Halfway Point'." It dawns on him.

BILLY

Purgatory?!!!

MADELINE

Very good.

(beat)

I understand your new existence may be shocking, confusing, and quite an adjustment.

BILLY

"Adjustment"? Yeah, a few hours ago - I had a thriving career: A 3-picture deal, a nationwide tour, a brand new comedy special; and all of that is gone forever! Do you have ANY idea what it's like to experience that kind of loss?!!

MADELINE

You don't think I've been through something like this? Try losing your family.

Billy is at a loss for words.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

Listen, I get it. Nobody wants to find out they're dead. Billy, why do you think you're here, "In The Middle"?

BILLY

I have no idea. I was a great comedian, I touched people's lives!

MADELINE

You were a great comedian. But you weren't a great person.

BILLY

Excuse me?

MADELINE

You were a man of many flaws.

BILLY

Hey, even Jesus had flaws. He hung out with hookers!

She stares at him for a moment, then speaks into her watch.

MADELINE

Cue media. Life Review of Billy Hargrove.

Suddenly, three enormous screens appear before them. The one in the middle displays footage of a mother holding her newborn baby.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

This middle screen shows every second of your life, from the very beginning.

The screen on the left shows Billy kissing a beautiful woman.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

This one shows every choice you made.

BILLY

Oh yeah, I remember her. Tracy from Houston. Or was it Sheila from Philly? No, I think it was Heather, who at the time was still technically "Heath" ...

She pauses that screen and turns on the one on the right.

MADELINE

And this shows how your choices
affected other people.

The screen shows the beautiful woman in a heated argument
with another man.

HUSBAND

You didn't think I'd find out you
had sex with Billy Hargrove?!!

BEAUTIFUL WOMAN (CRYING)

I'm sorry! I still love you.

HUSBAND

I want a divorce!!!

Madeline stops the tape.

MADELINE

So what were your flaws? Well,
let's start with lying, cheating,
stealing, manipulating, adultery-

BILLY

Whoa, "Adultery"? I wasn't married!

MADELINE

You slept with another man's wife.

BILLY

Hey, that's between them; I can't
help it if a hot, married woman
comes onto me.

MADELINE

You don't have to act on it.

(beat)

This is why you're here, to learn
how to take responsibility for your
actions. If you want to get into
Heaven?

BILLY

Of course I do! Okay, I take FULL
responsibility.

MADELINE

It's not that simple, Billy. You
wanna enter The Pearly Gates? Then
you have to earn it and save
people.

BILLY
Save people? From what?

MADELINE
From making the wrong choices. A
lot of folks need proper guidance.

BILLY
So you expect me to be a ghost
therapist? Now that's "Spiritual"!

MADELINE
I expect you to want to help.

BILLY
And I expect you to just shut up
and get me outta this Godforsaken
nightmare! I don't deserve to die!

He rushes out.

INT. PATIO - CONTINUOUS

Billy exits the front door, stands on the patio and screams
in frustration. Everyone in the area looks at him. SIMON
(30s), a quirky employee, hastily approaches. Madeline opens
the door and looks on.

SIMON
Sir, you need to bring the volume
down. You must be adjusting.

BILLY
Go to Hell!

Billy storms off, brushing against the Harp Player.

SIMON
I just got out! ... On good
behavior!

Simon looks at Madeline, ashamed.

MADELINE
Careful, Simon. That temper of
yours put you there.

Simon glares at the Harp Player.

SIMON
Well, at least they have better
music.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO.

INT. GYM - LATER THAT DAY

Billy is working a punching bag as hard as he can. He runs out of air and hugs the bag, desperately catching his breath.

BERNIE (O.S.)
Thought I'd catch you here, Kid.

Angle on Bernie, approaching. Billy looks up.

BERNIE (CONT'D)
I managed you for fifteen years. I know your patterns of behavior. Like right now, I know you're feeling sorry for yourself.

Billy grabs a towel, wipes his face, and sits on a bench. Bernie joins him.

BILLY
Lemme ask you something, Bernie. If you were me, how would you feel?

BERNIE
Honestly? Dumbfounded. Broken. Traumatized. And ready to do something about it.

BILLY
Like what?

BERNIE
Make things right.

BILLY
I don't deserve this.

BERNIE
You don't wanna be stuck here your entire Afterlife.

BILLY
No way.

BERNIE
Well, the ONLY way to do that is to assist those who really need it.

BILLY

Jesus, Bernie. You sound just like Madeline, The Chief Executive Cherub. That delusional woman has you brainwashed.

BERNIE

That "delusional woman" has saved more lives than you could ever imagine! Remember when your mother technically died?

Bernie grabs Billy's arm and closes his eyes.

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A doctor and his team operate on a woman in her early 30s, Billy's mom. The doctor uses defibrillators.

DOCTOR

Clear! Come on, lady; stay with me.

The machine hooked up to her is beeping. She's flat-lining.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

She's dying on the table! Let's go again! Clear!

The doctor emphatically uses the defibrillators and orders his team. After a highly tense moment, the woman stops flat-lining and returns to normal breathing.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

It's a miracle! Her levels are going back to normal. Great work, team!

The spirit of Madeline stands with her hand on the woman's shoulder. She bends down and kisses her forehead.

MADELINE

Take care of that little boy.

FLASH FORWARD
TO:

INT. - GYM - SAME

Billy is touched, yet still confused.

BERNIE

That's the whole purpose, Billy. We are here to literally save people from many things: habitually bad choices, failing to reach their potential, ruining other people's lives, devastating chain reactions, and more common than it should ever be - their own self-destruction.

BILLY

I'm not a savior, I'm a comedian!

BERNIE

There's no difference! Your entire life, you've made people laugh. Didn't you always say the greatest compliment you could ever get was a fan saying, "I had a rough week, but I feel so much better because you made me forget my problems"?

Billy nods.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

You're doing the exact same thing: Helping. Laughter truly is the best medicine, because people focus on the positive and improve their mental health.

BILLY

That's why you need me?

BERNIE

No, William. That's why *they* need you. Look, spirits have been guiding people for thousands of years. How do you think you came up with the idea to get such a great discount on your first house? How do you think your Mom started selling those delicious Pumpkin muffins in your neighborhood deli? Why do you think your Grandma saved all that bedbug evidence, which won her that huge lawsuit?

BILLY

Whoa! How the hell do you know all that?

BERNIE

We're Angels. We know everything.
And we're the inspiration for most
major creative changes. Name any
invention, I'll prove it.

BILLY

Okay, uh ... Alexander Graham Bell
inventing the telephone?

BERNIE

Angels.

BILLY

Mark Zuckerberg creating Facebook?

BERNIE

Angels.

BILLY

Ben Franklin discovering
electricity with a key and a kite?

BERNIE

Lucky drunk.

They both chuckle.

BILLY

Ok, final question: When can I talk
to Madeline?

BERNIE

I thought you'd never ask.

BILLY

Oh yeah, you did.

CUT TO:

INT. PORCH - LATER THAT DAY

Madeline sits on a hammock, slightly rocking and casually
sipping a bottled water. Billy sits across from her on a
chair, uncomfortably fidgeting.

BILLY

Okay, look ...the reason I
overreacted back there was-

MADELINE

Don't give it another thought. It's
in the past.

BILLY

I just miss everything I used to have so much-

MADELINE

I know you do. You're forgiven.

BILLY

I mean, I love life, and now it's just gone-

MADELINE

Shut up and listen.

BILLY

You got it.

MADELINE

Bernie says you wanna try guiding someone who REALLY needs it. Are you honestly prepared to do that?

BILLY

One hundred per cent.

CUT TO:

INT. SUICIDE HOTLINE CALL CENTER - NIGHT

Billy sits in a cubicle, in the middle of a suicide hotline call. He's frustrated. A Supervisor stands over him, scribbling on a clipboard and showing him notes.

BILLY

With your best friend? In your own bed? On your birthday? Yeah, I'd wanna kill myself, too.

The Supervisor wildly signals "No", making the "cut" gesture with his hand diagonally crossing his neck! Billy misinterprets this.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Yeah, definitely kill yourself! Go grab a knife and slice your throat!

Billy smiles and gives a proud thumbs-up to the Supervisor, who shakes his head and frantically waves both arms like a panicked Aircraft Marshaller.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM - DAY

Madeline and Billy are on her couch in her media room.

MADELINE

Okay, let's try an assignment
that's more in your wheelhouse.

BILLY

(Annoyed)

Sure.

She studies him for a moment, then speaks into her spy-esque watch.

MADELINE

Draw curtains and cue media.

Giant curtains automatically close around the porch, making it extremely dark inside.

BILLY

Every time you do that, I expect
you to go, "Goodbye, Mr. Bond."

She smiles. A spotlight hits the main wall, then a projector begins playing, starting with the image of MAX KIRKLAND (Late 20s) smiling at the camera.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Max Kirkland?

She nods.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Yeah, funny kid. He featured for me
in Rochester. What's the problem?

MADELINE

Watch this.

Projector plays Max doing stand-up.

MAX

I bought my girlfriend an electric
toothbrush, she loves it. In fact,
she loves it so much ... she's
thinking about using it on her
teeth.

The crowd laughs and applauds. Madeline stops the clip.

MADELINE

He's doing that joke on "Conan" tomorrow.

BILLY

Ok, great. It's a little dirty, but it's TBS, they say everything but F-Bombs.

MADELINE

There's just one problem: It's not his joke. He stole it. We thought you could help, since you know a little something about this.

She looks at Billy accusingly. He seems overwhelmed.

CUT TO:

INT. "GREEN ROOM" - NIGHT

Billy nervously paces in the room. The door swings open: It's Max and two other young men. Max surprisingly notices Billy.

BILLY

Max! Great show, buddy. Love that "Drunk on the plane" joke!

Billy extends his hand. Max shakes it, rather perplexed. The other two men don't acknowledge Billy as they head to the refrigerator and pull out drinks.

MAX

Thank you. Wow, this is a killer impersonation, you are dead on.

BILLY

Actually, I'm just dead.

Max is freaked out. He quickly calls to his buddies.

MAX

Hey, guys - check this out! How great is his costume, huh?

Angle on Max gesturing to the thin air.

FRIEND #1

Who is he, The Invisible Man?

The other friend laughs and high-fives him.

BILLY

They can't see me, dude. Only you can.

MAX

I'm serious. He looks exactly like Billy Hargrove - check it out!

FRIEND #2

Bro, you're pointing to a broken chair.

FRIEND #1

Well, that chair has a lot in common with Billy Hargrove: They're both no longer working.

The two friends cackle.

BILLY

Okay, THAT was uncalled for! Get 'em out, Max; we need to talk.

MAX

(Looking at phone)

Boys, I gotta ask you to leave. Sorry, my manager just texted; I need to call him.

The friends slowly rise.

FRIEND #2

Why can't I get a manager?

FRIEND #1

Why can't you get a job?

Friend #2 punches Friend #1 in the shoulder as they exit.

MAX

What the hell is going on?

BILLY

Yes, I'm me. Yes, I'm dead. And no, I'm not here to tell you how funny you are.

MAX

Oh, so I suck so bad, your ghost came back to heckle me?

BILLY

Well, now that you mention it, ghosts make great hecklers.

(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)
(Ghost impression)
"Boooo"

Max uncontrollably chuckles.

BILLY (CONT'D)
Look, of course you're funny. The
problem is, you're not original.

MAX
The talent coordinator for "Conan"
says I'm the most original comedian
he's seen in 5 years.

BILLY
Well, he's wrong. That opener is
NOT your joke.

MAX
What are you talking about? I've
been doing that for years.

BILLY
Yeah, ever since you stole it from
Zeek Feeney in Minot, North Dakota!

MAX
Whoa!
(beat)
Okay, how do you know that?

BILLY
I'm an Angel, we know everything.
How do you sleep at night knowing
you lifted another comedian's joke
that you're gonna do on TV?

MAX
Listen, I planned to open with
something else - but they wanted a
quickee that leads to the drinking
bits.

BILLY
That guy worked hard on a funny
punchline, and you're just gonna
take it?

MAX
He doesn't work hard, it's his only
good joke, and he's going nowhere!

BILLY

So that gives you the right to
recreate it for millions of people?
Everyone's gonna think he stole
from YOU. Have you thought AT ALL
about how this will affect him?

MAX

Yes! He took my girlfriend, so
screw him!

Just realizing what came out of his mouth, Max pours a drink
and sits down, trying to collect himself. Billy slowly sits
next to him and puts a sympathetic hand on Max's shoulder.

BILLY

Revenge makes us act abnormal.
Sometimes like sadistic sociopaths.

MAX

I'm not proud of it. A while back,
I dated a waitress at the Minot
club. I really loved her. But I was
traveling every week, she wanted
stability ... that's where he came
in.

BILLY

You should've just bought her an
electric toothbrush.

They share a smile.

MAX

You could appear to *anyone* and try
to solve any crisis. Why me and one
little joke?

BILLY

Because I made the same mistake.

MAX

Well, then you understand my
situation! Looks like it worked out
for you.

BILLY

Yeah, my life and career ended
forever. Yippee.

MAX

I mean, before that. You were
arguably the biggest comedian in
America.

BILLY
Here's how well I comprehend your
current scenario:

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

FLASHBACK:

We see STUART DONOVAN (20s, handsome and cocky) speaking into a microphone in front of a large audience.

BILLY (V.O.)
One of the dudes I started with was
Stuart Donovan. He was incredibly
talented, but even more self-
destructive.

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Stuart snorts a few lines of cocaine.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Stuart "stage-dives" off a table ... and lands on another table of athletic men, who angrily toss him out the door.

BILLY
The moment I began getting
attention from the industry, he
started asking me for favors. I got
him a few meetings, but he always
screwed them up.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

Stuart is being aggressively escorted out of the building by security, while a small crowd of people watch.

STUART
This is a big mistake! I said the
title of my pilot is "The Vapist"!
It's about weed, not-

A YOUNG WOMAN runs up to him with pepper spray.

YOUNG WOMAN
Predator!!!

She sprays him in the face. Stuart shrieks like a girl.

FLASH FORWARD
TO:

INT. GREEN ROOM - CURRENTLY

Billy continues the story to Max.

BILLY
Then he just kept asking for jobs.
I really wanted to help, but he was
too much of a liability.

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Billy and Stuart are having a fiery dispute.

BILLY (V.O.)
I was honest with him. He didn't
take it well.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Stuart types on a computer and smugly smiles.

BILLY (V.O.)
Then he sent an completely B.S.
email to everyone he knew that
said, "If Billy Hargrove performs
in the woods and nobody's there,
are the jokes still stolen?"

FLASH FORWARD
TO:

INT. GREEN ROOM - CURRENTLY

Billy and Max continue their conversation.

BILLY
So I took his best joke and did it
on my show. I figured what's the
difference, if I'm gonna be accused
anyway?

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

It's a scene from Billy's sitcom. Billy sits on a couch, having it out with his wife, DONNA.

DONNA

Billy, you blame everyone else for your mistakes.

BILLY

Yeah, honey - and who's fault is that?

We hear the laugh track of a sitcom as Billy's character looks amused with himself, and Donna looks annoyed.

FLASH FORWARD
TO:

INT. GREEN ROOM - CURRENTLY

Billy and Max in conversation.

MAX

Okay, so you took some douchebag's one good bit - who was lying about you after you gave him repeated opportunities that he sabotaged. And you didn't do it in your act, you threw it into some dialogue?

BILLY

I never gave him any money or credit, just because I was mad at him. I had to live with that the rest of my life.

MAX

Well, the good news is: Now your life is over.

Awkward pause.

MAX (CONT'D)

What ever happened to that guy, anyway?

Max takes a big gulp of his drink.

BILLY

He committed suicide.

Max does a massive spit-take!

MAX

Because of you?

BILLY

Well, he never left a note or anything. But not long after, he had some major bad luck - a breakup, lost his job, parents passed away. Next thing you know, he jumped off a hotel roof.

MAX

That's not your fault.

BILLY

Well, trust me, it sure felt like it.

(beat)

You can't do Zeek Feeney's joke, man.

MAX

Hey, it's already approved! The EP and censors went over all my material, I can't do it all over again with them. You know how anal they are!

BILLY

I don't care how you change your set. Just drop the bit.

MAX

Billy, we shoot tomorrow! I've rehearsed my set so many times, it's perfect!

BILLY

If you can't alter your jokes last-minute on the fly, you need to get out of the business.

MAX

I told you, that line sets up my drinking bits-

BILLY

So start with your drinking bits.

MAX

Why should I listen to you? You're not even real!

Billy walks to the door and turns around.

BILLY

Do that kid's joke, and you'll
regret it every day.

Billy exits The Green Room. Max angrily throws his glass in a
garbage can; we hear it break.

END OF ACT TWO.

ACT THREE.

INT. CONAN STUDIO - DAY

The audience is packed; it's a hot and devoted crowd! A sign above Conan's head reads, "Coming Up: Comedian Max Kirkland!"

Angle on Billy standing backstage, in a place where he can't be seen by Max. He has a perfect view of a monitor that displays the stage. Suddenly, Bernie appears next to him.

BERNIE

Good job, young man.

BILLY

Yeah, well, don't get your hopes up. This kid and his set list are more attached than conjoined twins.

Angle on Conan. Action!

CONAN

Welcome back to the program, folks. Our next guest is making is "Late Night" debut with us.

The crowd starts cheering!

CONAN (CONT'D)

That's right! He'll be at "Knee-Slapper's Comedy Club" in Fort Smith, Arkansas next weekend: please welcome Max Kirkland!

Applause, music, and Max enters. He takes center stage. Angle on Billy, stressfully holding Bernie's arm.

MAX

Thank you! So last night, I bought my girlfriend ...

Billy puts his head down, crushed.

MAX (CONT'D)

A drink.

Billy rapidly pops his head up, like an Adderall-ridden gopher in a golf hole.

MAX (CONT'D)

Her favorite alcoholic drink is called a "Kir Royale" ...

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

which apparently is French for "18 dollars".

Laughter. Billy is beyond relieved.

MAX (CONT'D)

18 bucks? Man, for that much money, it should come with a roofie.

Mixture of "oohs" and nervous chuckles.

MAX (CONT'D)

Relax, Ladies, I'm just joking, and I'm gonna help you out. Fellas, listen up: Stay away from "The Date Rape Drug". I tried it; nobody raped me!

Nervous laughter becomes applause.

BILLY

I can't believe they allowed that!

BERNIE

Hey, it's late night on TBS.

Angle on Conan laughing.

INT. STAGE - MINUTES LATER

CUT TO:

Laughter.

MAX

You ever get so drunk that you pass out, wake up naked holding a bag of peanuts ... and The Southwest Flight Attendants are really pissed off at you? They walk up to you, going, "Where do you think you are, Spirit Airlines?"

Big laughter and oohs.

MAX (CONT'D)

Your break's over, now get back in the cockpit and fly this damn plane!

Applause.

Angle on Billy and Bernie.

BILLY

Why are you still standing there?
Say "goodnight" and plug your
stupid CD!

BERNIE

Wait for it, William...

Angle on Max.

MAX

(As drunk pilot)
It's not my fault, Lady. You're the
one who served me a Kir Royale.
(As himself)
Thank you, Goodnight!

Angle on Billy and Bernie.

CONAN

Max Kirkland, Everybody!

Thunderous applause and cheers. Billy is relieved.

BILLY

Son of a bitch ended with a
callback, and I never saw it
coming! So much for Angels knowing
everything, huh?

Bernie stares straight ahead, smiling with no eye contact.

BERNIE

You're not an Angel.

CUT TO:

INT. CONAN STUDIO - MINUTES LATER

Conan is wrapping up his interview with Max.

CONAN

Thank you for coming on, Max.

MAX

Are you kidding me? What am I,
gonna say "No" to doing "Conan"?

Conan cracks up, as does the audience. Conan starts
improvising a fictitious Max phone call.

CONAN

"You want me to do my late night debut on The Conan Show? How dare you!!!"

MAX

"It's 'Wendy Williams' or nothing!"

Conan chortles.

CONAN

You're a really funny guy. Anything else you wanna plug?

MAX

My site is maxkirklandlive.com - and everyone should also check out my friend Zeek Feeney online; he's got the funniest electronic toothbrush joke ever.

CONAN

Well, one can never get enough electronic toothbrush bits. Ladies and gentlemen, Max Kirkland!

Angle on Billy and Bernie glancing at each other.

BILLY

I didn't advise him to do that. I should've, though. Dammit!

Bernie smiles.

INT. - BATHROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

CUT TO:

Max washes his hands and looks in the mirror. He sees Billy and jumps.

MAX

Bro, you gotta warn me before you appear like that!

BILLY

Well, contrary to popular belief, ghosts don't really text.
(playfully smirking)
Excellent job, my friend. I'm really proud of you.

MAX

Thanks, man.

BILLY

What made you take my advice?

MAX

It's the right thing to do. His joke deserves to come from him. As much as Zeek hurt me, I didn't want his self-inflicted tragedy to haunt me for eternity. No offense.

BILLY

None taken. Keep up the great work, Max. Creatively and ethically.

He shakes Max's hand.

MAX

When will I see you again?

BILLY

When you rob another comic.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Billy walks out and immediately sees Stuart standing on the street, staring at him. Billy is taken aback but approaches.

BILLY

Who the Hell would guess we'd meet like this? Wanna get a drink?

STUART

Believe it or not, I don't drink anymore. But I'll join you.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - CORNER BOOTH

Billy and Stuart toast. Bourbon and water, respectively.

BILLY

Congrats on being sober, man. Does "The Program" work the same here as on Earth?

STUART
Yeah, I couldn't have done it
without my sponsor. Or as I call
him, "My Bacardian Angel."

Billy gives a nod of approval.

BILLY
Stuart, I just want you to know-

STUART
Have you forgiven yourself?

BILLY
Come again?

STUART
Have you forgiven yourself? You
know, regarding me?

Billy pauses, looking away.

STUART (CONT'D)
Because I have.

Billy looks at him.

STUART (CONT'D)
Sure, it literally took a lifetime,
but I did. You should, too.

BILLY
I wanted revenge on you.

STUART
I know, man. And I wanted revenge
on career catastrophes that were
all 100% my fault.

BILLY
When I heard about you, ya know,
the way things ended ...

STUART
Billy, don't flatter yourself. I
didn't jump off that hotel because
of you. I left my life behind
because I was disappointed with how
I lived it.

BILLY
Was there no one you could talk to?

STUART

There were plenty. But I didn't want help; I wanted to avoid responsibility.

BILLY

How'd you know I was struggling with all this?

STUART

Come on, Billy. You think Angels are the only ones who know everything?

BILLY

Whoa! If you're not an angel, what are you?

STUART

Well unfortunately, in my religion, offing yourself is a one-way, non-refundable ticket to Hell.

BILLY

So you're a demon? I'm hanging out with a damn demon! What are you, Beezlebub?

STUART

(Laughing)

Not exactly. I cut a deal with my superiors. I encourage tortured souls to re-evaluate their lives and not take my path. I'm kind of an Afterlife motivational speaker. If I make enough progress, I can eventually live upstairs.

BILLY

Wow! So it's like a "Scared Straight" Program for Damnation!

Stuart nods.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Dude! I'm in the same boat!

STUART

No, you're not. I'm "Down There"; you're stuck in The Middle. Whether or not you get out? Well, that's up to you.

(beat)

(MORE)

STUART (CONT'D)

I gotta run. It was great to see you, Billy,

BILLY

Back atcha, Stu.

Stuart rises, shakes hands, and starts to leave.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Stuart - do you think I'm one of those tortured souls?

STUART

Naw, man. Just keep looking out for people in need.

Billy smiles, appreciatively. He's now comfortable enough to tease.

BILLY

You know ...for a starving artist, suicide is pretty hackey.

STUART

Hey - at least when I get "The Light", I just walk into it. You do another 20 minutes.

Billy laughs. Touché.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Billy is in a small chair, across from Madeline, who sits behind a large desk filled with neatly stacked files.

MADELINE

Well-done, William. All the messengers are talking about you.

BILLY

Sweet! Any of the hot, female ones?

She glares at him.

BILLY (CONT'D)

What? I didn't say "hot, married chicks". Ok, I'm gonna shut up.

MADELINE

Excellent choice. Do you think you can do this consistently? Every week, or even every day?

BILLY

Does a bear wear a funny hat?

She doesn't laugh.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

(awkwardly pausing)

Does The Pope shit in the woods?

She looks at him, solemnly. He clears his throat.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I mean, absolutely! I want to keep guiding people.

MADELINE

Why?

BILLY

(confused)

Madeline, I thought my interview was over.

MADELINE

It's crucial that you know WHY you want to come to people's aid.

BILLY

Because many desperately need it.

MADELINE

But why do YOU need to help them?

BILLY

Uh ... because it's the morally right thing to do?

MADELINE

Fill in the blank, Billy: "I want to help people because ... WHAT?!!"

She forces it out of him.

BILLY

BECAUSE I WANNA GET INTO HEAVEN!
ONCE AGAIN, I'M ONLY THINKING ABOUT MYSELF!

He pauses, realizing what he just said.

BILLY (CONT'D)
That's why I deserve to be here.

MADELINE
And that, my friend, is the lesson.
Thank you for finally being honest.
Welcome to your new life, Billy.

She extends her hand. He proudly shakes it.

BILLY
So what's my next assignment?

MADELINE
Don't worry, I'll be in touch with
you very soon about that. Any other
questions?

BILLY
Yeah, if Jesus walks into a
building and doesn't close the
door, do people say, "Were you born
in a barn?"

She stares for a moment, then begins uncontrollably laughing.

END OF ACT THREE.

TAG:

INT. CLOUD NINE BAR - NIGHT

Billy sits alone at a table. He's relaxed and enjoying
chicken wings. A seemingly emotionally UNSTABLE MAN (40s)
approaches and stands right in front of him, glaring.

BILLY
May I help you?

UNSTABLE MAN
In 1997, I saw you in Rockford,
Illinois and made the mistake of
heckling.

BILLY
Oh, boy. So I tore you a new one
and reamed both of 'em! Awesome,
tell me the story.

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT, 1997

Billy is onstage, rocking a loose and drunk late-night crowd.

BILLY

Did you hear about that plane that went down last week? Why would anyone get on a puddle-jumper that only seats six people?

The Unstable Man, at a table with a few people, pipes up.

UNSTABLE MAN

Hey, buddy! My Grandma was on that plane!

Tension builds as the room goes completely silent.

BILLY

Well ... let's dig her up and pork her!

UNSTABLE MAN

Sonuvabitch!!!

He tries bum-rushing the stage but is immediately stopped and dragged away by several beefy security guards.

FLASH FORWARD
TO:

INT. CLOUD NINE BAR - SAME AS BEFORE

BILLY

Sounds like something I'd do. But I'm sure you moved on, right?

UNSTABLE MAN

Yeah, with a toaster and a tub.

He stares intensely at Billy, unblinking. He's not kidding.

BILLY (JUMPING UP)

Oh, no! My God, I'm so sorry! Look, when hecklers interrupt the show, that gives the comedian complete creative license to verbally assault them. It's never personal-

UNSTABLE MAN

It felt pretty personal!

BILLY

I know, I know. Please sit down,
let me make this up to you, my
friend.

Billy sits, gesturing for him to do the same. The man eyes him a moment longer, then slowly smiles.

UNSTABLE MAN

You're good, man. The guy at the
end of the bar told me to say all
that.

Billy looks at the bar and sees Stuart slapping a stool with hearty laughter.

BILLY

Of course. What exactly did he
promise you?

UNSTABLE MAN

To reduce my sentence in The
Underworld.

The man starts walking off. Billy yells to him.

BILLY

Yeah, well, it just DOUBLED!
Haven't you heard of Karma?!!

Stuart saunters up, holding a bottle of water and a large shot of Maker's Mark, which he hands to Billy.

STUART

You gotta admit, he's a convincing
actor. Here's to you, brother.

BILLY

And here's to irony: Because you
might be in Hell, but I'm always
getting roasted!

Stuart cracks up. They toast, Billy downs his shot and wistfully looks up to The Heavens.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: "KNOCK 'EM DEAD!"

THE END